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PABLO PICASSO

CATALOGUE OF AN EXHIBITION OF WORKS BY PABLO PICASSO

WITH A PREFACE BY

CLIVE BELL

ERNEST BROWN & PHILLIPS
THE LEICESTER GALLERIES
LEICESTER SQUARE, LONDON
JANUARY, 1921

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PREFACE

ANYONE who came here some eighteen months ago to see that admirable exhibition of paintings by the other master, is almost sure to catch himself this time toying with the familiar opposition: Matisse and Picasso. The names go together as do those of Lenin and Trotsky or Fortnum and Mason. Even to people who seldom or never look seriously at a picture they have stood, these ten years, as symbols of modernity. They are pre-eminent; and for this there is reason.

Picasso is the paramount influence in modern painting—subject, of course, to the supreme influence of Cézanne. All the world over are students and young painters to whom his mere name is thrilling; to whom Picasso is the liberator. His influence is ubiquitous; even in England it is immense. Not only those, who for all their denials—denials that spring rather from ignorance than bad faith—owe their very existence to the inventor of cubism, but artists who float so far out of the main stream as the Spencers and the Nashes, Mr. Lamb and Mr. John, would all have painted differently had Picasso never existed.

Picasso is a born *chef d'école*. His is one of the most inventive minds in Europe. Invention is as clearly his supreme gift as sensibility is that of Matisse. His career has been a series of discoveries, each of which he has rapidly developed. A highly original and extremely happy conception enters his head, suggested, probably, by some odd thing he has seen. Forthwith he sets himself to analyse it and disentangle those principles that account for its peculiar happiness. He proceeds by experiment, applying his hypotheses in the most unlikely places. The significant elements of Negro sculpture are found to repeat their success in the drawing of a lemon. Before long he has established what looks like an infallible method for producing an effect of which, a few months earlier, no one had so much as dreamed. This is one reason why he is a *chef d'école;* and this is why of each new phase in his art the earlier examples are apt to be the more vital and well nourished. At the end he is approaching that formula towards which his intellectual effort tends inevitably. It is time for a new discovery.

Meanwhile, a pack of hungry followers has been eyeing the young master as he made clearer and ever clearer the nature of his last. To this pack he throws hint after hint. And still the wolves pursue. You see them in knots and clusters all along the road he has travelled, gnawing, tugging at some unpicked idea. Worry! Worry! Worry!

Here is a crowd of old laggards still lingering and snuffing over "the blue period." A vaster concourse is scattered about the spot where the nigger's head fell; and of these the strongest have carried off scraps for themselves, which they assimilate at leisure, lying apart. While, round the trunk of cubism is a veritable sea of swaying, struggling, ravenous creatures. The howling is terrific. But Picasso himself is already far away, elaborating an idea that came to him one day as he contemplated a drawing by Ingres.

And, besides being extraordinarily inventive, Picasso is what they call "an intellectual artist." Those who suppose that an intellectual artist is one who spends his time on his head mistake. Milton and Mantegna were intellectual artists; it may be doubted whether Caravaggio and Rostand were artists at all. An intellectual artist is one who feels first - a peculiar state of emotion being the point of departure for all works of art—and goes on to think. Obviously, Picasso has a passionate sense of the significance of form; also, he can stand away from his passion and consider it; apparently in this detached mood it is that he works. In art the motive power is heat always; but some artists drive their engines by means of boiling emotion, others by the incandescence of intellectual passion. These go forward by intense concentration on the problem; those swing with breathless precision from feeling to feeling.

Sophocles, Masaccio and Bach are intellectuals in this sense, while Shakespeare, Correggio and Mozart trust their sensibility almost as a bird trusts its instinct. It never entered the head of a swallow to criticise its own methods; and if Matisse can hardly choose a tone wrong, that is not because he has first tested his idea at every point, but because he is Matisse. Yet no one ever thought of going to a swallow for lessons in aviation: or, rather, Dædalus did, and we all know what came of it.

I do not presume to judge between one method and another; but I do say that, as a rule, it is the intellectual artist, who becomes, in spite of himself, schoolmaster to the rest. And there is a reason for this. By expressing themselves, intellectual artists appeal to us æsthetically, as all artists do. But, in addition, by making, or seeming to make, some statement about the nature of the artistic problem, they set us thinking. We feel sure they have something to say about the very stuff of art, which we, clumsily enough, can grasp intellectually. With purely æsthetic qualities the intellect can do nothing; but here, it seems, is something the brain can get hold of. Therefore, we study them and they become our leaders; which does not make them our greatest artists. I shall not judge between Matisse and Picasso.

One thing is certain, the difference between

them, whatever it may be, is not to be stated in those sharp antitheses that every journalist loves. Matisse is no singing bird with one little jet of spontaneous melody, and Picasso is anything but a dry doctrinaire. Nothing could be more obtuse than to represent one as all feeling and the other all thought. The art of Picasso, as a matter of fact, is perhaps more personal even than that of Matisse, just because his sensibility is even more curious. Look at a cubist picture by him amongst other cubists. Here, if anywhere, amongst those abstractions, you would have supposed that there was small room for idiosyncrasy. Yet in a gallery full of cubist pictures no amateur fails to spot the Picassos. His choice of colours, the appropriateness of his most astonishing audacities, the disconcerting yet delightful perfection of his taste, the unlooked for yet positive beauty of his harmonies, make Picasso one of the most personal artists alive.

I think it comes to this: Matisse is an artist; Picasso is an artist and something more—an involuntary teacher if you like. Neither, of course, falls into the habit of puffing out his pictures with literary stuff, though Picasso has, on occasions, allowed to filter into his art a, to me, disquieting dash of sentiment. That is not the point, however. The point is that, whereas both create without commenting on life, Picasso, by some inexplicable quality in his statement does,

unmistakably, comment on art; and that is why he, and not Matisse, is master of the modern movement.

CLIVE BELL.

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Catalogue

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No.

1. FIGURE. 1919. (*Drawing*)

2. ARLEQUIN. 1917. (*Drawing*)

3. LA TOILETTE D'ARLEQUIN. 1905. (*Water-colour*)
(Lent by Baron Caccamisi)

4. JEUNE SALTIMBANQUE. 1905. (*Drawing*)

5. ARLEQUIN. 1917. (*Drawing*)

6. LA RUE LEPIC. 1903

7. LA MANSARDE. 1903

8. JEUNE FEMME. 1905
(Lent by Frank Stoop, Esq.)

9. L'ENTERREMENT. 1903

10. MARIETTE EN PRISON. 1902 (?)

11. NATURE MORTE: INSTRUMENTS DE MUSIQUE. 1916. (*Water-colour*)

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No.

12. NATURE MORTE. 1914

13. NATURE MORTE: INSTRUMENTS DE MUSIQUE. 1916. (*Water-colour*)

14. NATURE MORTE. 1918

15. NATURE MORTE. 1912
(Lent by Clive Bell, Esq.)

16. NATURE MORTE: VERRE ET PIPE. 1919

17. NATURE MORTE. 1918

18. ARLEQUIN. 1916

19. NATURE MORTE. 1914

20. NATURE MORTE. 1914

21. LA DAME AU FAUTEUIL. 1914

22. NATURE MORTE. 1918

23. NATURE MORTE. 1915

24. FIGURE. 1914

25. NATURE MORTE. 1914.

26. NATURE MORTE. 1914.
(Lent by Roger Fry, Esq.)

No.

27. Nature Morte : Paquet de Tabac. 1919

28. Nature Morte. 1916

29. Le Verre. 1913.

30. Homme nu assis. 1908. (*Water-colour*)

31. Nature Morte. (*Water-colour*)

32. Nu. 1905. (*Drawing*)

33. Nature Morte. 1918. (*Drawing*)

34. La Pierreuse. 1905. (*Gouache*)

35. Danseuse. (*Water-colour*)

36. Les Trois Marins. 1903. (*Water-colour*)

37. Tête de Femme et Nature Morte. 1910. (*Drawing*)

38. Nu Accroupi. 1908 (?)

39. Au restaurant. 1905. (*Water-colour*)

40. Fenêtre ouverte. 1919. (*Water-colour*)

41. Homme à la pipe. 1914. (*Drawing*)

42. Femme et Enfant. 1907

No.

43. Tête de Femme. 1909. (*Water-colour*)

44. Nature Morte. 1916.

45. Arlequin. 1918. (*Drawing*)

46. Nu. (*Drawing*)

47. Pommes. 1917. (*Drawing*)

48. Portrait d'un Peintre Espagnole (*Drawing*)

49. Homme assis. 1914. (*Drawing*)

50. Femme nue assise. 1906. (*Drawing*)

51. Pierrot. 1918. (*Drawing*)

52. Figure. 1915. (*Drawing*)

53. Pierrot. 1918. (*Drawing*)

54. Femme nue debout. 1908. (*Drawing*)

ETCHINGS & DRY-POINTS

55. Tête de Femme

56. Salomé

No.

57. Deux Saltimbanques

58. Ménage de Saltimbanques

59. Le Roi d'Yvetot

60. L'Aveugle

61. Parade foraine

62. Famille de Misereux

63. Tête de Jeune Saltimbanque

64. Arlequin au Tambour

65. Tête de Femme

66. Cheval et Écuyères

67. Les Nomades

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68. Arlequin au loup. 1914. (*Drawing*)

69. Nu. (*Drawing*)

70. Nu. (*Pencil*)

71. Nature Morte. 1918. (*Drawing*)

72. Pierrots. 1918. (*Drawing*)
(Lent by Osbert Sitwell, Esq.)

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